

special feature

# SOLO SAFARI *Adventure*

As a wife and mother, going on a solo adventure can be nerve-racking, but it can also be just what you need as **Jade Smith** discovered on a recent visit to Rockfig Madikwe Safari Lodge



my week-long safari sabbatical. Apparently, the butter was hiding in plain sight, right there in the fridge. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Before I tell you how the household fared, let me paint a picture of Rockfig Madikwe. It's the kind of place that makes you question whether you've actually died and gone to safari heaven. A boutique lodge comprising only four villas, perfectly spaced apart, this combination of space and capacity makes it feel so relaxing. It's nestled high up on the plains of Madikwe Game Reserve. It's a sanctuary where luxury meets untamed wilderness. It was a five-hour drive from Johannesburg, where the turn-off was easy to miss. In fact, I did miss it and ended up at the Botswana border, a mere 5 km up the road. Madikwe is

teeming with wildlife, and I witnessed multiple sightings within the first few minutes of arriving. The pressure of daily life as a mother and wife melted away as I embraced the thrill of this solo getaway. As Beauty Director for *Woman&Home*, of course, I packed thoughtfully. I even googled what to pack for a safari and was sure to include heaps of sunscreen, a hat and lip balm – lucky for me because Northern South Africa is drier than dry in late winter. The trees were brown, the grass was dry, and the ground cracked from lack of moisture. Although this doesn't sound very appealing, let me tell you, there is nothing quite as beautiful as a dusty African sunset where the sun turns a hot pink just before it tucks itself behind the hill at the end of a long day. The game drives at Rockfig were nothing short of magical, the air crisp with cold and anticipation for what we might see. As the open-top vehicle navigated the rugged terrain, my eyes were treated to a parade of Africa's most iconic creatures, including a mother elephant nursing her young. I'm hit with a pang of guilt for leaving my three-year-old daughter behind. I hope she isn't pulling her usual stunt of not allowing Daddy to do anything for her in the morning routine. I check my phone, and there's a

**P**icture this: I, a seasoned multitasking maestro, embarking on a solo trip to Rockfig Madikwe Safari Lodge, leaving my dear husband to fend for himself and entrusting my cherubs to the chaos of everyday life without my meticulous orchestration. Hold onto your lattes, ladies, because this tale is about rediscovering the art of letting go, wild adventures, and realising that often we are our own worst enemies. As I packed my bags for this unexpected solo safari, the guilt-laden checklist in my mind screamed, 'What kind of mother leaves her offspring behind for a week?!' But wait, before you start sharpening those judgemental pitchforks, let me assure you – this was not a leisurely escape. Oh no, it was work. Hard work. You know, the kind where you're immersed in the world of majestic creatures and luxurious accommodations. Someone has to do it, right?

Leaving my husband in charge of the household felt akin to letting a puppy loose in a room full of squeaky toys – utterly unpredictable, potentially noisy, and with a high likelihood of finding surprises in unexpected places. Would they survive without me hovering over them like a caffeine-deprived helicopter mom? Spoiler alert: they did. And in my absence, I discovered that my husband, who couldn't find the butter at the best of times, miraculously located it during

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WhatsApp from my husband. 'Morning routine done and dusted, no issues.' I feel a mixture of pride and grief. Maybe they don't need me as much as I think they do. Our guide Hanru's knowledge is impressive, even though he is young and has only been guiding for a few years. He teaches about tracking and survival skills. Useful things like where to camp if you were abandoned in the middle of the park. We learn about making a fire and what plants burn well enough to stave off wild animals, but not too well they set the entire savannah alight. Although, to be fair, if I were lost out here, I would probably become a remarkable climber in record time and find myself at the top of the tallest tree, hoping that a leopard hadn't picked up my smell. Hopefully, Gucci Bloom is not to their liking.

We spend the better part of two hours trying to track a pack of hunting wild dogs, but in the end, my full bladder turns us back. The jolting vehicle isn't helping my cause, and I'm certainly not prepared to do a bush wee at hunting

time. I've learned from this trip to always pack a sports bra and not to sit at the back of the truck. Like the aeroplane, most turbulence is felt at the back, and you might knock yourself out without that sports bra. Jokes aside, these long game drives were my happy place. I felt alive with the wind whipping my hair as I marvelled at the beauty of nature in its purest form, reminding myself that sometimes it's okay to be selfish and revel in the world's awe without constantly worrying about how much TV is too much, do they have sunscreen on and when was the last time they drank water.

Dinner under the stars tantalised my taste buds and left me wondering if the lions were dining as exquisitely as I was. I'm pretty sure nothing beats a braai under the open sky, with the distant sound of what must have been a lion, or maybe it was just my stomach rumbling in anticipation of the desert. Being a malaria-free zone meant not worrying about the pesky mosquitos either.

Days at Rockfig start with coffee and a pastry, followed by a three-hour sunrise game drive. On return to the lodge, a lazy breakfast is served with all the trimmings. The food is excellent, and I ate far too much, as you do at an all-inclusive restaurant. I spent the in between downtime working by the pool, soaking up the winter sun, which in Madikwe felt a lot like Cape Town's summer sun. Lunch was served in the hide where the animal viewings were the real meaning of up close and personal. Elephants right there, cooling themselves by the waterhole and I even witnessed a group of rare mountain reedbeek having a drink.

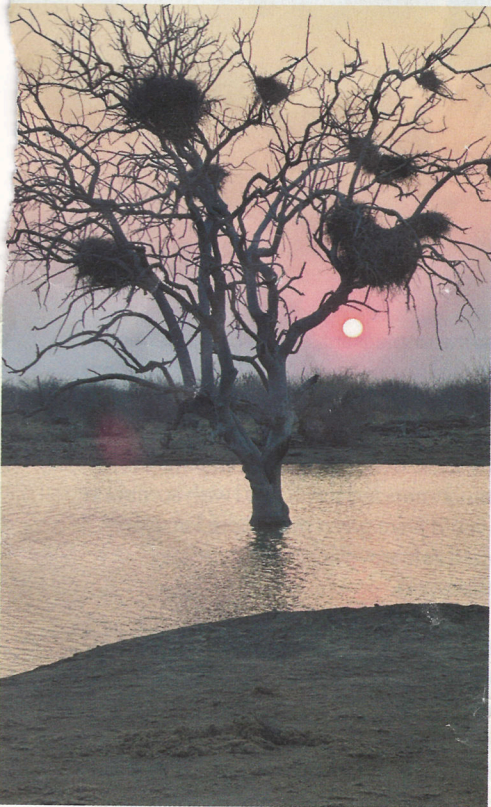
At times, I didn't know what to do with myself without the usual chaos. Sunbathing without someone shouting, 'Mom, where's my goggles?' felt like a rebellious act of self-love. It dawned on me that our families, when given the chance, are remarkably adept at handling the intricacies of daily life. It turns out my husband can juggle school drop-offs, science projects, and bedtime stories without my nagging guidance. Well, almost. They didn't have matching socks on every day, and I think they

## NITTY-GRITTY

- ✦ **Accommodation includes all meals and snacks, two game drives daily, local soft drinks, house wines, beers and spirits, WiFi, pickup and drop-off at Madikwe's Western Airstrip.**
- ✦ **Inkwe Family House includes a private safari vehicle and ranger.**
- ✦ **Optional extras include bush walks, in-room spa treatments, private vehicle and private chef.**
- ✦ **Extras: Conservation Levy R190 per adult per night; R95 per child aged 3-12 years.**
- ✦ **Gate entry R180 per adult and R80 per child aged 3-12 years.**
- ✦ **Villas from R9 250 per night per person sharing.**
- ✦ **For bookings or more information call: 068 079 3196 or visit: [rockfigmadikwe.co.za](http://rockfigmadikwe.co.za)**

skipped bath time once or twice, but really, who cares? They certainly didn't. As I lounged by the pool, sipping on an ice-cold G&T, I couldn't help but reflect on the expectations placed upon women. I considered who puts this pressure on us. Is it mostly us putting the pressure on ourselves? In my case, the pressure was mainly coming from me. It was a bitter pill to swallow. Could I learn to stop sweating the small stuff like the hole in my son's trouser knee, or the mismatched socks? I reminded myself to learn to embrace the chaos of life and accept the house might be messier than I would like it to be, but this wild unknown is where the magic lies and part of this was acknowledging that life goes on even when I'm not at the centre of the domestic circus.

Rockfig Madikwe became my haven of self-discovery. It was a place where the rhythm of nature drowned out the cacophony of everyday life. With their warm smiles and impeccable service, the lodge staff ensured that my solo adventure was not just an escape but a transformative experience. Returning home, I half expected to find my family in shambles, surviving on a diet of cereal



PHOTOS: HANRU NOFTJE (INSTAGRAM: HANRUWILDFEEL), COURTESY: IMAGELIFE. PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF PRINT AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

## *Rockfig Madikwe became my haven of self-discovery*



**TIP!**  
*Take cash for the gratuity. It is customary to tip room staff and your guide. If you forget to take cash, you can also tip via the card machine at reception.*

and pizza. To my surprise, the house was intact, the kids were alive (and well-fed), and my husband managed to keep the chaos at bay. Ultimately, my solo safari escapade taught me that sometimes you need to take your head out of the race that is everyday life to appreciate the small things and take the time to snuggle before bedtime. The dishes can wait. So, here's to roaring laughter, wild adventures, and the liberating realisation that it's OK to let go, even if it's just for a little while. Because sometimes, the best way to care for others is to take care of ourselves first.